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PRIVATE SECTOR LEARNING CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS

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IDRC Study/Acacia Initiative

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Introduction

While much attention is being paid to the concept of community-based learning centres, there has been little attention paid to the private sector usage of such centres. If Internet technology can be cost-effectively utilised to make information and training available at the community level, why should it not be able to provide solutions at the corporate level? World-wide there is a trend towards the use of multimedia training solutions to provide information and training when it is needed and where it is needed. As the Internet technologies mature and become more multimedia oriented, there is a growing realisation amongst corporates that these technologies can provide such solutions. In the developing world, where resources are so limited, it makes sense that if companies were to establish learning networks for generic training, these facilities could be extended into the communities at very little extra cost.

The objective is to create an electronic classroom in the workplace which meets the need of management, the unions and the workers. Both management and the unions realise that to compete in the international environment workers need to be trained in information technology. However, a start needs to be made with more basic training starting with courses such as ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training), viz literacy and numeracy training. The intention is to use technology based Internetworking solutions to provide this type of education with computer literacy and information access being almost the by-product of such training.

The concept of the sustainable electronic learning centre is based on the premise that if this centre can be shown to be cost-effective and relevant to the private sector, the costs to extend the concept into the under-privileged community will be reduced. This will occur for two reasons:

- ☐ 1. The content costs will have been borne by the private sector;
- ☐ 2. The communication costs, to extend the connectivity of the learning network into the under-privileged areas, because of shorter distances will be reduced.

The objective of this report was to explore private sector Learning Centre partnership opportunities and prepare a plan for a pilot activity which includes employer support, union/worker participation and potential roles for other support organisations.

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Executive Summary

There is immense potential for the creation of Internet technology based electronic Learning Centres which address the needs of the employer, the union and the community. The concepts and technologies involved are new and innovative however, so it is going to take time to educate these players of this potential.

Everybody contacted could see the benefits of such an initiative, but because of a lack of understanding of the real benefits and opportunities, tended to focus on their particular areas of current need. Despite the fact that a lot of work had been done (and will continue to be done) prior to the start of this project it is still not an easy concept for most non-technology players to grasp. There are still a large number of human resource and training individuals in the corporate environment who have still not seen the Internet, let alone understand the multimedia capabilities and technology advances that it represents. This lack of understanding and knowledge also applies in the other constituencies. It is therefore going to take longer than three weeks to convince the various potential partners that this does represent a win-win opportunity for all involved. This is therefore, an ongoing project.

Initial feedback as to the concept has been positive from all the parties. Labour has reserved its right to respond until feedback from their constituency but appears to be positive, particularly in the technology divisions (those who understand the technology). The private sector appears to be conservative in their approach to the suitability of these new technologies to address both the company requirements and the needs of the workers. While many of the companies are investigating the introduction of the technologies for marketing or business purposes, not many are currently contemplating its use for educational purposes. It is apparent from discussions that the company needs to be innovative and open to the use of technology within their business as well as have a good understanding and relationship with their workers before the concept will be entertained. Their focus is also very much on measuring the Return on Investment for such an initiative.

Due to the education process required, further work will be required to ensure the complete buy-in of the potential partners. In order to achieve this buy-in, the development of pilot studies to demonstrate the concepts and capabilities to all concerned should be undertaken.

Report Back

Corporate

A number of large corporations were approached to sound out the electronic classroom concept. For a full list of contacts please see Appendix B. These included :

- ☐ August Laepple
- ☐ CNA
- ☐ Kynoch
- ☐ Medscheme
- ☐ Kloof Gold Mine
- ☐ Nedcor Bank
- ☐ Omnia
- ☐ Pick and Pay
- ☐ Post Office
- ☐ South African Breweries

The responses from these companies was, as was to be expected, as individual as the individuals within them. The overriding focus of all these companies was on their corporate specific training needs. In other words, they could see the benefit of this type of technology-based solution but their focus lay specifically on addressing their immediate

needs. Even those companies that were busy with Intranet installations were focusing on business and marketing applications ("bottom-line applications"), not on the human resource applications ("warm and fuzzies").

There have been a number of positive responses from the corporate sector. Nedcor Bank College has installed an Internet technology based learning centre in Johannesburg and is busy testing the concept for its own corporate content. The rollout is expected to extend to Durban, Cape Town and Bloemfontein in the next six months. They are open to the concept of extensions into the community but further consultation and work is required. Another very positive response has been from August Laepple, who are also looking to the concept for their own corporate content and the possibility of ABET. The proposal is being put to their management team at the beginning of March to obtain their buy-in and to allocate some financial resources to the concept.

Another potential partnership exists between Vodacom, Siemens, NUMSA and the community of Diepsloot. Vodacom Community Services has identified that the informal housing settlement of Diepsloot requires a telephone shop. They are busy with the process of identifying a site and franchisee to fulfil this need. As this informal settlement is based in Midrand and Siemens is both a supplier to Vodacom and also based in Midrand, and the resident union at Siemens is NUMSA, we are in the process of putting all these players together to see if we can develop an electronic learning centre partnership. The second stage of this development would be to include the government and the Universal Service Agency.

Discussions are also still ongoing with August Laepple and the provision of ABET. If they do decide that this technology does provide a viable, cost-effective alternative for their training requirements the concept of extending it out into their feeder community of Soshanguve to provide training to their worker's families has been mooted. The concept is being presented to their international directors in March and if it gains management approval could be the start of an ongoing project.

Unions

A number of worker based organisations were also contacted. These included :

- ☐ COSATU - Confederation of South African Trade Unions
- ☐ Ditsela - The human resource support for COSATU
- ☐ NUMSA - National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
- ☐ SADTU - South African Democratic Teachers Union
- ☐ CWIU - Chemical Workers Industrial Union
- ☐ SASBO - The Finance Union
- ☐ SACCAWU - South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union

The overall response was a guarded positive one from the union movement. While they could not give an unqualified response without consulting with their constituency, most of the union leaders could see the benefit of such an open technology approach. The unions, with their influence both in the workplace and the community, are the key to the success of the electronic classroom concept. They also have very specific training requirements. While their demands in the workplace are for ABET and other development opportunities, this tends to be a local issue. At a more national level the union focus is very much on training and developing the union officials to improve the effectiveness of the unions. This feedback was confirmed by Chris Bonner of Ditsela. She is not averse to the concept and would possibly support an initiative once better defined. The possibility therefore exists, of getting Ditsela's buy-in if a company can be persuaded to install the infrastructure. In other words, her emphasis is also on particular content needs.

The most positive union response was from COSATU and NUMSA. Discussions are ongoing with COSATU, particularly with regard to the creation of Web based training material for the

new Labour Relations Act. Cas Booraney and Jenny Grice at NUMSA were positive about the possibility of setting up of electronic classrooms. They have been informed of the developments with Siemens and will offer facilitation support with the resident union officials, if required.

Recommendations

Content

In order to set up an electronic Learning Centre in both the workplace and the community, local, relevant learning content needs to be established. In order for any of the potential partners to take the lead in this type of initiative there needs to be established content that is of distinct benefit to, at least, their constituency. A phased approach to initiate a pilot project is required, the envisaged steps being outlined in Appendix A.

Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)

Basic numeracy and literacy training would benefit both the employer and the employees as well as the community at large. For most companies however, this is not their area of focus. They wish to focus on training and education which gives them a direct measurable return on investment, and most appear reticent to focus on this type of medium for ABET. However if this content can be provided as a product or service additional to their corporate specific requirements there is certainly a potential market. The route to this market, however appears not to directly lie through the provision of this training but through a focus on corporate specific training material.

In order to overcome this a sample or pilot project needs to be established in the ABET arena. Discussions have been started with Kagiso Publishers and other private sector companies such as August Laepple and Nissan in order to begin with this content creation. As this is not directly addressing their corporate requirements the sales cycle is longer so may take some time.

The New Labour Relations Act (LRA)

Following discussions with both the Information Technology and Education divisions of COSATU, they expressed an interest in the creation of electronic Web based content in this arena in order to facilitate both training and dissemination of information. For the unions, there is a vital need in this area.

Corporate Specific Training

From a corporate perspective, most companies wish to focus on training that will be of direct benefit to them and contribute directly to their profitability, either in terms of increased revenues, reduced costs or improved quality. The focus for the company is therefore to meet their immediate and direct needs; the marketing process to these companies needs to take this into account.

Access

The concept that needs to be understood by all the potential partners is that all of the above content and many other examples can all be accessed via the same medium. The challenge is to address the self interest of each of the parties to ensure that their objectives are being met. If this can be achieved, the concept will indeed be win-win for each of the partners.

While the corporate needs to be convinced of the cost effectiveness of such a concept, the unions have an immensely important role to play in the establishment of electronic learning centres. The unions, who also have access into the community structures, can take the lead in

this type of initiative if their interests are being met.

Conclusion

The concept of the creation of electronic learning centres through partnerships is one that should be pursued. It is not an easy concept for non-technologists or the potential partners who traditionally, in South Africa, come from different ends of the political spectrum, to grasp. In order for the concept to work, each of the potential constituents needs to understand that their particular requirements are being met. This can be done when the parties learn that the electronic learning centres, connected to an electronic network, is merely a new and practical medium to deliver training, education and information at all levels to their various constituents. This process, is not necessarily however, an easy one. Apart from the fear and lack of understanding of technology trends, the traditional mistrust between the potential parties needs to be overcome. The best way of achieving this is to prove these concepts through the piloting process.

In order to create a pilot project, the content, that addresses the needs of all the constituents, can kick-start the process. The access, both in the workplace and the community, can follow with the groundwork having been done together with the content creation. Then, when the community is ready for the classroom, there will be quality, relevant content for both the workers and the extended community to access. In this way, the costs of the content and connectivity can be recovered from the private sector, and the only costs that will have to be borne by the community for the concept to be sustainable is the infrastructure costs.

Appendix A

Development of the Electronic Learning Centre Pilot

Before the development of a complete pilot Electronic Learning Centre, which incorporates both the electronic classroom in the workplace and the community based electronic classroom, there needs to be content which will be accessed by via this medium.

In order therefore to develop the concept of the Electronic Learning Centre, one needs to get the buy-in of the relevant partners through a process of staged development. It is envisaged that to achieve these objectives the focus will lie on the development of local, relevant content for each of the interested parties. While this content is being developed, further work will be required to continue marketing the concept to the potential partners and developing a business plan for access by the community. The creation of the content will therefore create a demand by each of the various parties; corporate specific content for the company, union information for the workers and ABET for the community. The company will provide access for the workers, the union should support this based on exposure to their training and information and support the expansion of the access to the broader community.

The plan therefore consists of the following:

- ☐ Phase One - Content Creation and Workplace Electronic Classroom - Months 1 to 3
- ☐ Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)

Further work is required to establish a potential buyer for this content delivered by the electronic medium. In the discussions with the unions, the most progressive union was NUMSA who readily understood and appeared keen to develop the concept. They have identified at least two progressive corporations, Mercedes Benz and Siemens, who they believe may be open to such a suggestion. NUMSA has requested a proposal be put together which they will discuss with their company representatives and then take to the respective companies in an attempt to get their buy-in. Further work is required in this arena.

The New Labour Relations Act (LRA)

COSATU, has already requested that the focus lie on the provision of LRA training and education via this medium. This content could be developed in a Web based format utilising their existing content in both paper and video format for both live distance based training and remote information access.

From the information gathered from COSATU on their LRA course, the Web based multimedia, interactive content will consist of approximately 250 Web pages taking approximately 125 person days to create. The course will include short video clips for Intranet based content or storyboards for less bandwidth intensive applications and will include graphics and animations to make the content fun and dynamic. Work will also be done on ensuring that provision is made for access to the trainers via any of the communication mediums that this technology makes feasible.

The estimated costs (excluding VAT) for such an exercise are:

	Rands
HTML programming and Graphic creation	125 000
Programming - Java, Javascript and ActiveX	40 000
Video clips - capture and edit	15 000
Total	180 000

Corporate Specific Training

Further consultations need to take place with the private companies identified above and others that have expressed a broad interest or where there is potential in this solution for their training needs.

Discussions with the resident union at these companies is also necessary in order to ensure that the process is both transparent and consultative. The buy-in of both COSATU and the resident union should also make the expansion into the community more successful.

Community Extension

During this phase, work will also need to be done on working with the community that feeds either the targeted companies to lay the groundwork for the extension of the Electronic Classroom into that community. This will be done in conjunction with some of the private and state small business development agencies to ensure that on the successful completion of Phase Three, there will be funds available for the Community Electronic Classroom to be established as a small business venture and for the concept to be developed as a franchise-type operation for expansion into other areas.

Phase Two - ABET Development - Months 4 to 6

Phase Two will focus on the creation of ABET content. The corporations who have reacted positively to this medium for training are obvious potential buyers of this type of content; which can also be delivered to the community. By the end of Phase Two, there will be relevant content for each of the major potential partners of this initiative.

Should there not be corporate support for such content creation, further work should be done during Phase One in fund raising from developmental institutions.

The estimated initial funding requirements for the development of this content is R250 000.

Phase Three - Community Expansion - Months 7 -12

Phase Three will build on the content that has been created and the groundwork that was done in Phase One and Two to extend the electronic classroom into the community. The outcome of this phase will be a community based electronic classroom and a business plan for the development of a franchise-type organisation that will provide for the creation and support of further such community based electronic classrooms.

The further details of Phase Two and Three, together with detailed financial requirements and allocations should be finalised during Phase One. The estimated funding requirements to establish a community based electronic classroom during this phase is in the order of R250 000.

Appendix B

Contacts

Institution	Name	Telephone	Status
August Laepple	Jock Loseby	(012)	See Report.
CNA	Mike Stevenson	491-7500	Discussing the concept with IT
Kagiso Publishers	Gert de Beer	(012) 328-4620	Understand and appreciate the concept, see need for ABET content. Have had discussions with Nissan.
Kloof Gold Mine			Meeting set for March.
Kynoch	Leah Livni	802-3114	Interested in ABET. Following up with company.
Medscheme	Dirk Norton		Setting up Intranet. Next stage training. Follow up in March.
Nedcor Bank	Tom Metrowich	630-7741	Installed corporate pilot. Extending concept. Need to follow up on partnership into the community.

Omnia	Danie Du Toit	016-976-0230	Has seen details. Wishes to follow up later. Diarised for March.
Pick and Pay	Linda Sacks	456-2600	Open to concept. Seed planted. Lots of follow up required.
Post Office	Lulama Chakela	(012) 421-7489	Meeting set up and cancelled. Should occur in March.
South African Breweries	Mike Romburgh	Training Institute 466-2919	Setting up Intranet. Interest in corporate training. Community extension may take time.
Vodacom	Mohudi Mathiba	322-1061	See report. Setting up with Siemens.

COSATU	Charley Lewis, Shele Papane	339-4911	See report
Ditsela	Chris Bonner	403-2155	Positive response. Looking for pilot project to launch specifics.
NUMSA	Cas Booraney, Jenny Grice	832-2030	See report.
SADTU	Leon Russell	334-4830	Three meetings set up - three meetings missed.
CWIU	Chris Sellars	331-6861	Referred to Chris Bonner and the Plastics Industry Training Board, Bill Naude - follow up required.
SASBO	Jacky Kalash	403-3115	Discussions held. Different requirements to partnership focus.
SACCAWU	Alina Rantsolase, Dan Sekonya, Herbert Mkhize	337-1110	Positive meeting. Wished to follow up with constituency.

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